

CLAIMS:

1. A method of preparing or modifying a cheese or cheese-like product comprising mixing into a cheesemaking mixture or a product, a heat-killed ferment of an
5 exopolysaccharide-producing-microorganism without separating the exopolysaccharide from the other components of the ferment.
2. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the heat-killed ferment is directly mixed into a cheesemaking mixture.
3. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the heat-killed ferment is mixed into an
10 ingredient used in making the product.
4. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 3 wherein the heat-killed ferment is a ferment prepared using a lactose-rich medium and an exopolysaccharide-producing-microorganism.
5. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 3 wherein the microorganism
15 does not hydrolyse lactose, and the ferment comprises an added lactase or galactosidase enzyme or an organism which produces an enzyme which hydrolyses lactose.
6. A method as claimed in claim 4 wherein the medium contains more than 1.0% (w/v) lactose.
7. A method as claimed in claim 5 wherein the lactose-rich medium is a fraction of
20 milk.
8. A method as claimed in claim 6 wherein the fraction is serum or mother liquor; or raffinate or breakthrough derived from milk or skim milk or buttermilk or whey or serum or mother liquor or permeate; or permeate derived from milk or skim milk or buttermilk or whey or serum or mother liquor or raffinate or breakthrough.
- 25 9. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the microorganism is a food-acceptable microorganism,
10. A method as claimed in claim 8 wherein the lactose-rich medium comprises a dairy permeate.
11. A method as claimed in claim 9 wherein the dairy permeate is a milk permeate
30 or a whey permeate.

12. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 10 wherein the microorganism is selected from *Xanthomonas campestris*, *Sphingomonas paucimobilis* and lactic acid bacteria.
13. A method as claimed in claim 11 wherein the microorganism is selected from *Xanthomonas campestris* and *Sphingomonas paucimobilis*.
14. A method as claimed in claim 11 wherein the microorganism is selected from *Lactobacillus delbrueckii* ssp *bulgaricus*; *Lactococcus lactis* ssp *cremoris*; *Lactococcus lactis* ssp *lactis*; *Streptococcus salivarius* ssp *thermophilus*; *Lactobacillus casei* ssp *casei*; *Leuconostoc mesenteroides*; *Lactobacillus helveticus*; *Lactobacillus reuteri*; *Lactobacillus rhamnosus*; *Lactobacillus plantarum* and *Lactobacillus sakei*.
15. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 13 wherein fermentation is conducted at a temperature of 20-35°C.
16. A method as claimed in claim 14 wherein the fermentation is incubated for 16-240 hours.
17. A method as claimed in claim 15 wherein the mixture is fermentation incubated for 60-120 hours.
18. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1-17 wherein the ferment is heated and spray dried.
19. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1-17 wherein ferment is heat-killed and mixed directly with a dairy product.
20. A method of modifying a milk protein concentrate comprising adding to the concentrate a heat-killed ferment of an exopolysaccharide-producing-microorganism without separating the exopolysaccharide from the other components of the ferment.
21. A method of preparing a cheese or cheese-like product comprising the steps of
- (a) adding to a cheese milk, a heat-killed ferment of an exopolysaccharide-producing-microorganism without separating the exopolysaccharide from the other components of the ferment;
 - (b) adding a proteolytic enzyme to the mixture;
 - (c) collecting the resulting curd;

(d) further processing the curd to produce a cheese or cheese-like product.

22. A process of preparing a cheese or cheese-like product comprising the steps of

- 5 (a) providing a cheese precursor mixture comprising milk proteins
(b) adding to the cheese precursor mixture a heat killed ferment of an exopolysaccharide-producing-microorganism without separating the exopolysaccharide from the other components of the ferment

(c) providing conditions under which the product gels.

10 23. A method as claimed in claim 22 wherein the conditions of (c) are provided by cooking the mixture to denature milk proteins and allowing the mixture to gel.

24. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1-23 wherein the product is a cheese.

25. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1-24 wherein the product is a processed cheese.

15